

Behavioural Activation for Low Mood

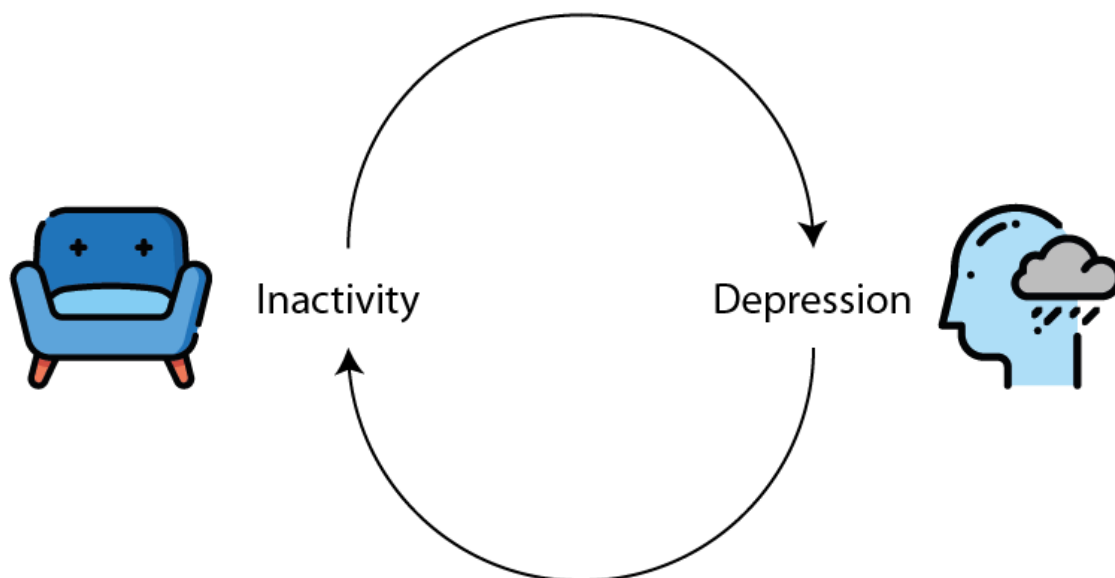
When we are depressed we become less active. The less active we are the fewer opportunities there are for positive and rewarding things to happen to us. And the fewer rewarding things that happen to us the lower our mood becomes. Behavioural Activation (BA) is one way out of this vicious cycle. It is a practical and evidence-based treatment for depression.

The relationship between what we do and how we feel

Psychologists have found that there is a close relationship between our activity and our mood. When we are feeling good we spend time with people whose company we enjoy, do activities that make us feel good, and take on new tasks and adventures that challenge us as individuals. All of this activity has positive feedback effects:

- Doing things we enjoy gives us feelings of **pleasure**
- Challenging ourselves means that we have a chance to grow and develop, and gives us a sense of **mastery**
- Having positive relationships with other people makes us feel **connected and valued**

The reverse is true too. People who are depressed tend to do less overall and so they have fewer opportunities to feel pleasure, mastery, and connection – the things we need to feel good. It is easy to fall into a trap:



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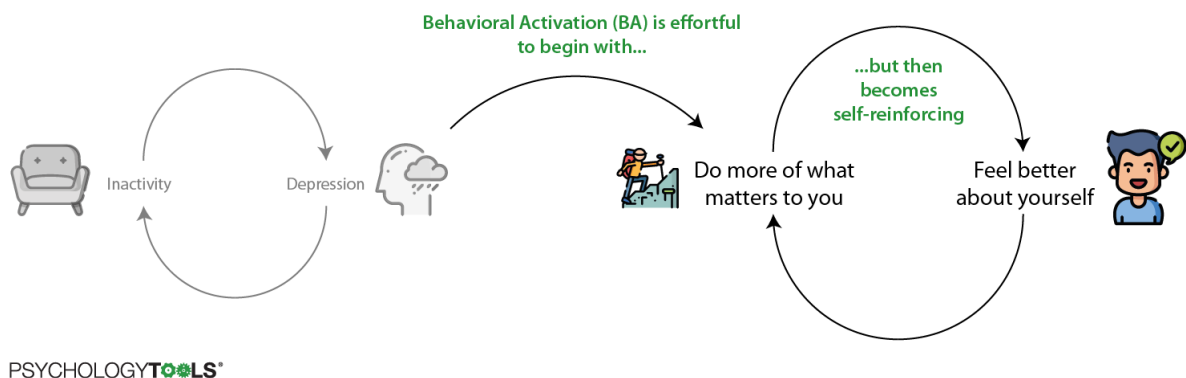
What is Behavioural Activation?

One way out of this trap is to wait until something external improves our mood – if it does then we might feel more like getting back to our old levels of activity. This approach is passive though, and it

can leave you feeling helpless. One big problem with the passive approach is that you are likely to be waiting for a long time – left to themselves episodes of depression can last for months at a time!

A more proactive way of breaking the vicious cycle of depression is to increase our level of activity *even if we don't feel like it to begin with*. This approach is called **Behavioural Activation (BA)** and it is a psychological treatment for depression with one of the biggest evidence bases to demonstrate how effective it is. Behavioural activation for depression is about making your life meaningful and pleasurable again, it involves these steps:

- Learning about the vicious cycle of *inactivity > depression > inactivity* and understanding that we need to activate ourselves to feel better again
- Monitoring our daily activities to understand the relationships between our activity and our mood
- Identifying our values and goals (working out what really matters to us)
- Simple activation (scheduling and carrying out meaningful activities to boost our experiences of pleasure and mastery)
- Problem-solving any barriers to activation



This guide will walk you through all of the essential steps to get you started with behavioural activation.

Activity monitoring: recording what you do and how you feel

The first step in behavioural activation therapy is to monitor your activity and mood to understand more about how your depression works. This is called *Activity Monitoring*.

You can use an activity monitoring diary to record what you do each waking hour every day for a week. Make sure to record everything on this behavioural activation worksheet – even activities that don't seem very important. We need to find out how your mood changes as you do different activities, so rate your mood for each time slot on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing feeling very depressed and 10 representing feeling very good.

Find your activity monitoring diary on page 17.

Reviewing your activity monitoring: learning about the association between activity and your mood

Once you have monitored your activity for a week you can use your activity monitoring record to look for patterns between your activity and your mood. Look at your completed behavioural activation worksheet and ask yourself these questions:

- What activities were associated with your highest mood? What were you doing when your mood was highest?
- What activities were associated with your lowest mood? What were you doing when your mood was lowest?
- What do you notice about the relationship between your mood and how active you were?
- Were there any days when you didn't leave the house? What was your mood like on those days?
- What was your mood like on the days when you were most active?

Now make a list of activities which helped you to feel good, and which made you feel bad. You will use this list in one of the later steps.

Activities That Made Me Feel Good	Activities That Made Me Feel Bad
<i>Cooking myself dinner</i> <i>Having lunch with my friends</i> <i>Going for a walk around the lake</i>	<i>Sitting at home and thinking about my problems</i> <i>Lying in bed all morning</i> <i>Worrying about where my life is heading</i>

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Values: thinking about what matters to you deep down

Our values reflect what we find meaningful in life. They are what you care about, deep down, and what you consider to be important. Everybody's values are different, and they can change over time. They reflect how we want to engage with the world, with the people around us, and with ourselves. Psychologists think that a happy life is one where we are in touch with our values: where we are doing at least some of the things that we think are important.

Values are different from goals. Put crudely, goals can be achieved whereas values are more like directions that we want to head in. For example we might have the value of *being a good parent* which may require a lifetime's effort, and the specific achievable goal of *getting my children to school on time*. Or we might have the goal of *going for a jog* while placing value upon our *physical health*.

The domains below are valued by some people. There might be values you think are important, and others that don't matter so much to you. There are no 'right' answers. Read the descriptions and think about what values are important to you.

Value	Description
Family	What kind of relationships do you want to have with your family? What sort of brother / sister / mother / father / aunt / uncle / niece / nephew do you want to be? How do you want to be in those relationships?
Marriage / couple / intimacy	What kind of husband / wife / partner do you want to be? What kind of relationship do you want to be a part of? What sort of partnership do you want to build? What kind of person do you want to be in a relationship?
Parenting	What sort of parent do you want to be? What qualities do you want your children to see in you? What kind of relationships do you want to build with them?
Friendships / social life	What sort of friend do you want to be? What friendships is it important to cultivate? How would you like to act towards your friends? What kind of social life matters to you?
Career / employment	What kind of work is valuable to you? What qualities do you want to bring as an employee? What kind of work relationships would you like to build? What kind of work matters to you?
Education / personal growth / development	How would you like to grow as a person? What kind of skills would you like to develop? What matters to you about education and learning? What would you like to know more about?
Recreation/ fun / leisure	How would you like to enjoy yourself? What relaxes you? When are you most playful?
Spirituality	What kind of relationship do you want with God / nature / the Earth?
Citizenship / environment / community	What kind of environment do you want to be a part of? How do you want to contribute to your community? What kind of citizen would you like to be?
Health / physical wellbeing	What kind of values do you have regarding your physical wellbeing? How important to you is your health? How do you want to look after yourself?

Spend some time thinking about *your* values. Which values are important to you? How successfully you are living your life in accordance with your values at the moment? Use the table below to guide your thought process.

Value	Description of your values	Importance How important is this value to you? (Rate 0-10)	Success How successfully have you lived your life in accordance with this value in the past month? (Rate 0–10)
Family			
Marriage / couple / intimacy			
Parenting			
Friendships / social life			
Career / employment			
Education / personal growth / development			
Recreation/ fun / leisure			
Spirituality			
Citizenship / environment / community			
Health / physical wellbeing			

Simple activation: planning and engaging in valued activity

The next step of behavioural activation is to get active. You know by now that it is important to increase your level of activity *even if you don't feel like it to begin with*. With behavioural activation for depression we can kick-start your activity by planning it and sticking to the plan. Get a piece of paper and write down a selection of possible activities.

Good places to get some activation targets for your activity plan are:

- **Get activation targets from your activity monitoring worksheet:** Which activities were best at improving your mood?
- **Get activation targets from your values assessment worksheet:** Which values matter to you the most? What activities could you do that would be in line with your values? For example, if family is something you value perhaps you could plan to spend time with them doing something specific.
- **Make sure that you are doing the basics:** Be sure to include targets like washing and brushing your teeth every day, doing laundry every week, cooking meals, shopping for food,

and to include some activities that are social and which mean you will have contact with other people.

- **Use an activity menu:** Use a list of activities that have helped other people to pick some that you think might lift your mood. Find an activity menu on page 18.

Once you have written down a selection of possible activities it is time to create an activity hierarchy. This will help you to choose the best activities to get started with. To create your activity hierarchy write a list of activities and rank them according to how difficult you think they will be to accomplish (0 = not at all difficult, 10 = very difficult).

Activity	Anticipated difficulty (Rate 0-10)
Go to an exercise class once this week	7
Get out of bed by 8am every day	6
Go for a haircut	5
Repair the kitchen shelf	4

Now it is time to schedule some activities for the next week. Find your activity planner on page 19.

Start by choosing some activities with low difficulty ratings. Write down the activities that you will do on an activity monitoring record form. It is important to be specific about:

- **What** the activity is
- **When** you plan to do it
- **Where** you will do it
- **Who** you might do the activity with

Activity (What?)	Details (When? Where? Who?)	Outcome & Rate Mood (Rate mood 0-10)
Go to an exercise class	Tuesday 6pm	Completed (7)
Get out of bed...	...by 8am every day	5 out of 7 days
Go for a haircut	Thursday lunchtime, barber near home	Completed (5)
Repair the kitchen shelf	Monday morning, at home	Completed (8)

Once you have planned activities for a week in advance the next step is to put the plan into action. Good luck, you can do it!

Activity Monitoring Diary - remember to record what you are doing, and how it made you feel –

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9am-10am					
10am-11am					
11am-12pm					
12pm-1pm					
1pm-2pm					
2pm-3pm					
3pm-4pm					
4pm-5pm					
5pm-6pm					
6pm-7pm					
7pm-8pm					
8pm-9pm					
9pm-10pm					
10pm-11pm					
11pm-12am					

Activity Menu – Lockdown Friendly

- Take some time to write down 5 things you are grateful for in your life
- Use google to research a topic you'd like to know more about
- Read a book
- Watch a TV show or film you enjoy
- Have a relaxing bath, or hot shower, with your favourite shower gel
- Do one cleaning job you've been putting off (washing up/vacuuming)
- Call someone who you enjoy talking to
- Tidy one room
- Make your favourite drink, a hot chocolate or posh coffee
- Make yourself a meal
- Listen to music you like
- Get a pen and paper and draw something in your environment
- Do a mindfulness meditation
- Do a crossword puzzle, find one online if you don't have any to hand
- Give yourself a manicure/pedicure
- Do 15 minutes of exercise – yoga, running on the spot, lifting weights, starjumps
- Play a musical instrument
- Take some photos
- Have a home spa day
- Do some DIY, finish a job you've been meaning to
- Do some colouring, you can print colouring pages from google
- Bake a cake
- Listen to a podcast or audiobook, you can find these free online
- Rearrange your furniture
- Video call someone you enjoy talking to
- Spend time washing your hair and styling it in a new style

Further activities

- Go for a walk, get outside and breathe in the fresh air
- Attend a social group or club
- Treat yourself to a meal out, or take yourself for a picnic
- Meet up with friends for a coffee
- Do some physical exercise –swimming, running, cycling, walking
- Go to the library, borrow a book that catches your eye
- Visit a local wildlife sanctuary

Activity Planner

Book in at least three activities for each day.

Activity. What?	When, Where, Who?	Outcome? Rate Mood?